

**STATEMENT
OF
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VETERANS' EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING SERVICE
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF LABOR
BEFORE THE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY
COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

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Introduction

Good Morning Chairman Wenstrup, Ranking Member Takano, and distinguished Members of the Subcommittee. Thank you for the opportunity to participate in today's hearing. As Deputy Assistant Secretary for Policy at the Office of Veterans' Employment and Training Service (VETS) at the Department of Labor (DOL or Department), I appreciate the opportunity to discuss the implementation of the revised Transition Assistance Program (TAP), Transition Goals, Plans, Success (GPS).

As the military drawdown continues through Fiscal Year (FY) 2017, the Department of Defense estimates that approximately 250,000 service members (including members of the Guard and Reserve) will leave the military annually. The brave men and women who serve our nation deserve a good job and a chance to utilize their unique skills to help build our economy. Yet, many separating service members face a difficult transition and struggle to find a job worthy of their talents in an improving, but still-challenging labor market.

Under the leadership of President Obama, the Administration is committed to ensuring that America fulfills its obligations to our returning service members, veterans, and their families by providing them with the services and support they need to successfully transition to the civilian workforce. The TAP redesign is an important part of the Administration's efforts to fulfill this commitment.

Transition Assistance Program (TAP) Employment Workshops

TAP, as codified under 10 U.S.C. 1144, is a collaborative effort led by the Departments of Labor, Veterans Affairs (VA), and Defense (DoD), aimed at providing separating service members and their spouses with the training and support they need to transition successfully to the civilian workforce. Through TAP, DOL brings its extensive expertise in employment services to bear to provide a comprehensive three-day Employment Workshop at U.S. military installations around the world.

Since the Department started providing Employment Workshops over 20 years ago, the number of workshops, participants, and locations has continued to grow. In 2003, TAP was expanded to

overseas military installations, and in FY 2005, courses were offered to returning members of the Reserve and National Guard via the 30, 60, and 90-day Yellow Ribbon Reintegration programs. Most recently, Congress passed and President Obama signed into law the “VOW to Hire Heroes Act of 2011” (VOW Act), which, among other things, made participation in the DOL Employment Workshop mandatory for most transitioning service members, including those demobilizing from the National Guard and Reserve Components.

Since the inception of the program, the Department has provided training and services through Employment Workshops to over 2.6 million separating or retiring service members and their spouses. Last year alone, DOL conducted more than 6,600 Employment Workshops for over 207,000 participants at 206 military installations worldwide. Of the 207,000 participants, more than 9,000 were National Guard and Reserve.

Veterans Employment Initiative (VEI) Task Force for a Career-Ready Military

In 2011, the President established the VEI Task Force to ensure the career readiness of transitioning service members. The Task Force consists of joint representation from DOL, DoD, VA, Department of Homeland Security (U.S. Coast Guard), the Department of Education, the Small Business Administration, and the Office of Personnel Management. The President approved the Task Force’s plan to strengthen and build upon the existing TAP program which is now known as Transition Goals, Plans, Success program or Transition GPS.

DOL Employment Workshops – Redesign

Simultaneously, the Department initiated a significant redesign of the DOL Employment Workshop (DOLEW) to make it more engaging and relevant in light of the unique challenges facing returning service members. This was an extensive process that involved numerous pilots, evaluations, and feedback from reviewers and agency partners. In addition, the VOW Act required that DOL use contract facilitators to deliver its Employment Workshops to ensure a standardized, high-quality professional cadre of facilitators.

DOL awarded a contract to GBX Consultants, Incorporated, a Service-Disabled Veteran Owned Small Business, in August 2012 for the facilitation of all DOL Employment Workshops at locations worldwide as part of TAP. The contract is a Base year plus four option years, Indefinite Delivery Indefinite Quantity (IDIQ), that runs through September 2017. DOL will recompet the contract during FY 2017. DOL monitors the performance through review of Transition GPS Participant Survey results, regular site assessments by DOL federal field staff, and input from DoD and military services stakeholders. DOL can report thus far that the vendor is executing the contract requirements in a satisfactory manner.

In FY 2013, the Department completed the conversion to contract facilitation, as well as the full implementation of the new DOL Employment Workshop curriculum at all military installations worldwide. The result is an enhanced Employment Workshop that provides a highly effective training approach and prepares service members for a successful transition to the civilian workplace.

Transition Goals, Plans, Success (GPS) Program

Under the current Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), the supporting agencies have a greater sense of their roles and responsibilities in support of Transition GPS,¹ which now includes four basic components to help service members prepare for separation and meet career readiness standards. They include (1) Pre-Separation Assessment and Counseling, (2) Transition GPS Core Curriculum; (3) Career Specific Additional Curriculum; and (4) CAPSTONE.

Pre-Separation Assessment and Counseling: Through the new transition program, separating service members will receive individual counseling to discuss their career goals and start their transition process. Each service member will be introduced to the programs and services available to them during their transition. In addition, each service member will begin to develop an Individual Transition Plan (ITP) that documents his or her personal transition, as well as the deliverables he or she must attain to meet the new transition program's Career Readiness Standards.

Transition GPS Core Curriculum: The Transition GPS Core Curriculum includes a financial planning seminar, VA Benefits Workshops, the redesigned DOL Employment Workshop, and other modules. Transitioning service members will also undertake a Military Occupational Code Crosswalk to translate their military skills, training, and experience into civilian occupations, credentials, and employment. To enhance the existing electronic tools used for the crosswalk, DOL contracted with an organization to identify equivalencies between military and civilian jobs, as required by the VOW Act. The results of the military equivalencies study have enhanced the military-civilian crosswalk by enabling the mapping of a single military occupation into multiple civilian occupations based on an analysis of embedded skill sets in addition to the similarity of tasks performed.

Career-Specific Additional Curriculum: In addition to completing the Transition GPS Core Curriculum, service members also have the option of participating in a series of two day tailored tracks within the Transition GPS curriculum: (1) an Accessing Higher Education Track (provided by DoD), for those pursuing a higher education degree; (2) a Career Technical Training Track (provided by VA), for those seeking job-ready skills and industry-recognized credentials in shorter-term training programs; and (3) the "Boots to Business" Entrepreneurship track (provided by SBA), for those wanting to start a business.

CAPSTONE: Before their separation from the military, service members participate in a CAPSTONE event, which will involve chain of command verification that transitioning service members completed the Transition GPS curriculum and achieved Career Readiness Standards. Service members who require additional assistance will be referred to supplemental

¹ Memorandum of Understanding Among the Departments of Defense, Veterans Affairs, Labor, Education, and Homeland Security (U.S. Coast Guard), the U.S. Small Business Administration, and the U.S. Office of Personnel Management, regarding the *Transition Assistance Program for Separating Service Members* (TAP MOU), of January 31, 2014.
<http://prhome.defense.gov/Portals/52/Documents/RFM/TVPO/files/TAP%20MOU%20Final%20January%2031,%202013.pdf>

training opportunities. In addition, through the CAPSTONE event, service members will be offered a “warm handover” to appropriate federal, state, and local government agencies, such as the American Job Centers, as needed.

Transition GPS Core Curriculum: DOL Employment Workshop

The redesigned DOL Employment Workshop includes three days of classroom instruction that is specifically geared toward the mechanics of getting a good job. On the first day of the Employment Workshop, participants develop their “Change Management Plan” and identify their overall strategy for transitioning into the workforce. They explore careers that complement the skills and expertise gained through their military service. Participants also develop a master job application from which they build targeted resumes, and they learn how to research the job market using the latest search tools.

On the second day of the Employment Workshop, participants learn how to analyze the job market and use social media in job searches and networking. Instructors discuss the difference between applications and resumes, and participants practice completing applications and developing targeted resumes. On the third day of the Employment Workshop, participants learn about special veterans’ hiring authorities and how the Federal job application process differs from the private sector. Finally, participants work extensively on their interviewing skills and end the workshop with a mock interview exercise.

During the third quarter of FY 2014, VETS conducted a pilot with the Army’s Warrior Transition Command, Army Installation Management Command (IMCOM), and the Ft Bragg Army Career and Alumni Program (ACAP) to provide a modified DOLEW to the wounded warrior population residing at Ft Bragg, NC. That population’s medical conditions and appointment schedules made it very difficult for them to attend a regular 3-day workshop. The DOLEW curriculum was segmented into 6 modules taught in 3-hour blocks of instruction spaced out over several weeks. The pilot was well-received and VETS is preparing to expand the delivery of this modified workshop to additional Army installations, as well as the other military service branches this Fiscal Year.

In January 2015, the Department updated the Employment Workshop curriculum to include information about disability-related employment and education protections. DOL had already included that information in the online virtual curriculum and has updated the brick and mortar curriculum to reflect the additional information. Additionally, the updated Employment Workshop curriculum ties in the online Veteran Employment Center resource, a single veterans portal for employment resources jointly developed by the VA, DOL and DoD, for use in the participants’ transition.

DOL is pleased to report that the new Employment Workshop curriculum has been well received. From its introduction in fiscal year 2013 through the fourth quarter of fiscal year 2014, over 350,000 transitioning service members experienced the new curriculum. Of the over 11,000 participants who most recently responded to a survey in FY 14 Q4, 91% reported that they would use what they learned in their own transition planning and 89% reported that the DOLEW

enhanced their confidence in transition planning. The data strongly suggest that the Department's revised Employment Workshop is meeting the high expectations of its audience.

American Job Center (AJC) Resources and CAPSTONE

Throughout the DOL Employment Workshop, instructors discuss relevant employment services, including those pertaining to dislocated workers, available to assist transitioning service members, veterans and their families both before, during, and after their separation from the military. All veterans, including recently separated service members, and eligible spouses, receive priority of service in DOL-funded employment and training programs. As a result, DOL offers continuous employment services support to veterans before and after they leave active duty and leverages department-wide programs to provide comprehensive job services.

Most of these programs and services are available through the nationwide network of nearly 2,500 American Job Centers (AJC). The AJCs serve as the cornerstone for the Nation's workforce investment system and provide a range of services including counseling, resume writing workshops, job skills assessments, occupational training, on-the-job training, and job placement services.

During the DOL Employment Workshop, service members will also download and receive a “Gold Card,” which entitles them to enhanced intensive services for six months from AJC staff. Veterans with significant barriers to employment will receive intensive employment services at AJCs from Disabled Veterans' Outreach Program (DVOP) specialists funded through the Jobs for Veterans State Grants (JVSG) program. However, most veterans who receive services through the AJCs are served by programs funded by DOL agencies other than VETS.

As previously mentioned, if a service member is assessed as not meeting Career Readiness Standards during their CAPSTONE event, their commander can facilitate a “warm handover” of the service member to the public workforce system for a review of the employment services available through AJCs and to facilitate access to appropriate services. This warm handover is accomplished either through introduction to a local AJC staff member, or through a call from the service member to the DOL Toll-Free Help Line (1-877-USA-JOBS or 1-877-872-5627). Being identified as not meeting these standards also allows the service member to receive services from a DVOP regardless of their disability status or other significant barriers to employment.

The Toll-Free Help Line is prepared to assist service members by identifying and providing contact information for the AJC that is located closest to the base from which they are transitioning or to the community to which they will be transitioning, and to describe the services available through that AJC.

DOL Employment Workshop: Online Training Resources

While completely redesigning the classroom version of the Employment Workshop during FY 2013, DOL also completed the development and implementation of a virtual Employment Workshop. Working with the U.S. Army Soldier For Life – Transition Assistance Program (SFL-TAP) office, DOL began conducting regular synchronous virtual Employment Workshops.

This is the same three-day workshop delivered in real time in a virtual classroom setting using the Army's virtual classroom platform.

Along with the synchronous virtual workshop, DOL worked with DoD Joint Knowledge Online (JKO) to convert the Employment Workshop instructor-led classroom curriculum into an asynchronous online distance-learning format. This is a self-paced online version of the Employment Workshop that service members can use to reinforce and refresh what they have learned in the classroom. DOL has made the virtual curriculum available to all veterans and transitioning service members through the DOL VETS web site at <http://www.dol.gov/vets/programs/tap/index.htm>.

Additionally, the Department assisted in the development and ongoing improvement of the online Veterans Employment Center. The new online resource brings together a wealth of public and private job opportunities, a profile-builder, military skills translator, and detailed career and training resources together all in one place. In November 2013, the Department also launched a new veteran-focused resource page for workforce practitioners. The resource page, available at <http://veterans.workforce3one.org>, is hosted on Workforce3One, the Employment and Training Administration's on-line technical assistance and peer learning platform.

Off-Base Transition Training Pilot

Section 301 of the Dignified Burial and Other Veterans' Benefits Improvement Act of 2012, PL 112-260, January 10, 2013, authorized the Secretary of Labor to provide the DOL Transition Assistance Program Employment Workshop under 10 U.S.C. § 1144 to veterans and their spouses at locations other than military installations via a pilot program. DOL conducted this two-year pilot "Off-Base Transition Training" program so that the feasibility and advisability of providing such a program to eligible individuals at locations other than military installations can be assessed.

After considering the requirements of Section 301(c) of the Dignified Burial Act, including that at least two participant states have high unemployment among veterans, and accounting for geographic dispersion, DOL invited Georgia, Washington, and West Virginia to participate in the pilot. All three states accepted. DOL used its current TAP contract facilitator to provide the selected states with the standard 3-day DOL Employment Workshop for the Off-Base Transition Training program. As of December 31, 2014, 22 three-day workshops have been conducted under the pilot. DOL concluded the pilot on January 9, 2015 and will submit its final report to Congress in March 2015.

Outcome Tracking & Studies

DOL will continue to review feedback and evaluate the Employment Workshops on an ongoing basis to ensure that the curriculum remains relevant, learning is taking place, and service members feel prepared to transition from military service and pursue other career goals.

For example, in FY 2014, DOL implemented a standardized assessment tool to measure the delivery of Employment Workshops by contract facilitators. DOL staff conduct on-site

assessments, using the tool to rate instructors on 10 elements. The score, as well as any identified weaknesses or best practices are communicated to DOL leadership and the facilitation contractor.

In order to assess the facilities in which classes are taught, site assessment reports by DOL staff and the DOL contractor provide critical information on each classroom where a workshop is conducted – whether it allows for interaction between students and facilitators, provides computers or internet capability, and whether it is properly lit and climate controlled. This information allows DOL to work with military installations to adjust learning conditions if necessary.

Additionally, DOL has awarded a contract to independently evaluate the Employment Workshop. The evaluation will include a quasi-experimental design (QED) impact analysis to analyze the impacts of the TAP DOLEW program on employment-related outcomes for separating military service members. It will also involve a small pilot to evaluate differential impacts of new delivery approaches for the TAP DOLEW (e.g., variations to the delivery of the program, the use of social media or other modes to enhance delivery or to serve as refreshers of TAP program lessons, or variations in the visual design of TAP program or outreach documents). The Employment Workshop Evaluation will utilize impact analysis to better understand the overall impact the Employment Workshop is having on transitioning service members' employment outcomes. Data for this evaluation is expected to be available in FY 2017.

Beginning in Program Year 2012, the TAP participant characteristic was added as a new reporting element for AJCs, indicating whether a participant attended the DOLEW within the past three years. This reporting element will be combined with other outcome measures such as:

- ▶ The percentage of TAP participants who are employed in the first quarter after exiting the AJC program;
- ▶ The percent of those entering employment who also are employed in the first and second quarters after entering employment; and
- ▶ Six-month average earnings.

State workforce systems are still implementing this new data field. Data are expected to be available in FY 2016 that will help assess the impact of attendance at the DOLEW on a veteran's successful transition to civilian employment.

In FY 2014, as a member of the TAP Senior Steering Group Curriculum Working Group, DOL began an annual curriculum evaluation. This included analysis of results from the web-based Transition GPS participant survey instrument developed by DoD, and input from various stakeholders. Based on this evaluation, DOL revised the Employment Workshop curriculum to include Equal Employment Opportunity and Americans with Disability Act content, the Veteran Employment Center content, and enhanced information on Workforce Innovation Opportunity Act training, dislocated worker training, and registered apprenticeship programs. The FY 2015 curriculum review will begin in April 2015, in conjunction with the TAP Senior Steering Group Curriculum Working Group's planned review of the entire Transition GPS curriculum.

Conclusion

The Department looks forward to working with the Subcommittee to ensure that our separating service members have the resources and training they need to successfully transition to the civilian workforce. Assistant Secretary Kelly, and I routinely visit TAP locations as we travel around the country and the world. Secretary Perez recently visited a TAP class in Kaiserslautern, Germany, and spoke with transitioning service members and their families about their TAP experience, and will continue to visit classes and meet with veterans and service members in his future travels. Additionally, Deputy Secretary Lu will be attending a local TAP class next week. Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member, distinguished Members of the Subcommittee, this concludes my written statement. Thank you for the opportunity to be a part of this hearing.